

Dear Department of Political Science and Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs,

We would like to express our adamant opposition to your sponsorship of the upcoming talk by Ryszard Legutko. We firmly believe that Ryszard Legutko's actions and rhetoric violate Middlebury College Community Standards.

We ask the Political Science (PSCI) Department and the Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs (RCGA) to consider Ryszard Legutko's own words. Legutko authored an entire book, *Why I am Not Tolerant*, deriding multiculturalism and egalitarianism. In his article, "What's Wrong With Liberalism?" he writes: "Multiculturalism is always either a highly regulated system or a homogenizing ideology which conceals its homogeneity by selecting some fashionable minority "culture"—homosexuals, Africans, feminists—to which its adherents kowtow and make this kowtowing the criterion of "openness" to plurality" (p. 13). He dismisses those fighting for their essential human rights (the "multiculturalists") as tyrannical, rhetoric that is offensive at best and downright dangerous at worst, given the violence LGBT people, women, and black people still face all over the world. In an interview with France 24 Legutko argued that gay marriage is an "unnecessary, destructive experiment." Additionally he called Pride "aggressive, anti-Christian and shocking." His generalized grouping of queer, African, and feminist folks demonstrates clear prejudice for disparate groups that diverge from a white Christian hegemony.

In his latest book, the subject of his upcoming talk, he once again dismisses feminists and gay people as members of a communist conspiracy group, writing, "they [communist and liberal-democratic artists] perform similar roles: a proletarian was replaced by a homosexual, a capitalist by a fundamentalist, exploitation by discrimination, a communist revolutionary by a feminist, and a red flag by a vagina" (p. 140 in e-text). In so doing, he dismisses the struggles of historically marginalized groups especially LGBTQ+ individuals and women who to this day continue to fight for equal rights and liberties. By comparing the female body to a "red flag," he contributes to the continued dehumanization of women. He promotes an anti-feminist anti-LGBTQ+ platform that reduces members of the Middlebury community into a conspiracy group.

We then ask the PSCI Department and the RCGA to consider Ryszard Legutko's membership of the "Law and Justice Party" (PiS). PiS is a far-right political entity known for its homophobic, racist, sexist, and xenophobic orientations. In 2018, PiS sparked international outrage when they marched alongside far-right groups for Poland's independence day. Banners at the march read "Pure Poland, White Poland", "Refugees, get out!", "White Europe of brotherly nations," and "Islam = Terror." In addition to their rhetoric, the party has weakened Polish democracy by challenging the independence of the judiciary and silencing opposition, for example through the "Act on the Institute of National Remembrance," which criminalizes mentioning Polish collaboration with the Nazis during the Holocaust.

We urge the PSCI Department and RCGA to rescind their support for Legutko's engagement, as it sends a direct message to the student body and to the greater community that Middlebury as an academic institution does not value the emotional and mental wellbeing of a large number of community members and groups on this campus. This talk brings harm to students yet adds nothing of intellectual value to the wider campus community, nor does it align with the Alexander Hamilton Forum's stated goal of "foster[ing] thoughtful engagement with the ideas that have informed the creation and development of the American polity."

There is nothing thoughtful or innovative about giving even more space to homophobes, racists, and misogynists than they already occupy in the American political sphere.

By co-sponsoring a speaker who blatantly and proudly expounds homophobic, racist, xenophobic, misogynistic discourse, the RCGA is severely undermining its mission to “build bridges across disciplines and communities”. In endorsing Legutko and the rhetoric that he embodies, the RCGA is shutting out large swaths of the Middlebury community, all of whom are engaged, critical, and rigorous thinkers whose energies would be better spent not combating degrading and dehumanizing rhetoric.

By co-sponsoring a speaker who writes and has built a career off of homophobic, xenophobic, racist, misogynistic discourse, the PSCI Department is repeating the same mistakes as it has in the past. By once again ignoring a litany of voices in our Middlebury community, the PSCI department is failing to “meet the demands of thoughtful citizenship.” Students have voiced again and again that bringing speakers such as Legutko is not productive. Academic departments should set a standard as to what is debatable, and we firmly believe that homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny are not, are never debatable. A cornerstone of any kind of “thoughtful citizenship” should always be listening, and we urge you all to recall the events of March 2, 2017 where the administration, including President Laurie Patton and the PSCI Department failed to listen to the voices of students.

In the time post-March 2nd, alongside institutional retribution, students faced mental, emotional, academic, and personal challenges from having their existence on this campus trivialized. We see this event as coming dangerously close to re-inflicting a similar pain on the student body. As students, faculty, and community members who care deeply about the growth of this institution, we see this event as a regression, an antithesis to Middlebury’s hopes to “foster the inquiry, equity, and agency necessary for [students] to practice ethical citizenship,” all within an “inclusive environment”. Inquiry, equity, and agency cannot be fostered in the same space that accepts and even elevates homophobic, xenophobic, misogynistic discourse. Bigotry of any kind should not be considered a form of inquiry.

Once again, we strongly urge you to withdraw support and your co-sponsorship of the upcoming talk by Ryszard Legutko. As institutions of authority at Middlebury College, the PSCI department and the RCGA should be sending a strong message that bigotry of any form is unacceptable instead of giving bigots a platform at the expense of student well-being.

Respectfully,